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Fishery Leaflet 353

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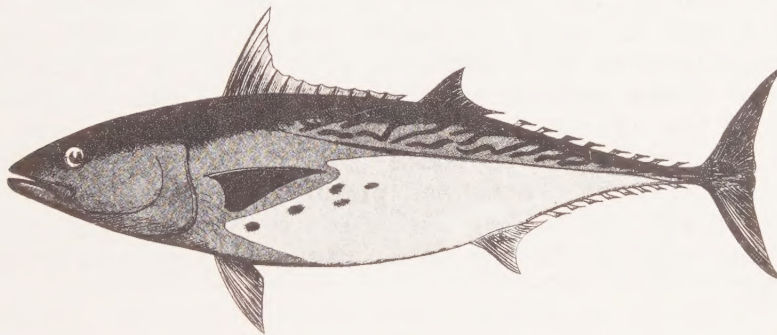
Washington 25, D. C.

December 1949

"LITTLE TUNA" OF THE ATLANTIC AND GULF COASTS

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Recent developments offer some encouragement for the commercial canning of "little tuna," Euthynnus alletteratus, along the Atlantic and the Gulf Coasts. For many years this fish has been caught in varying amounts in these areas. From Cape Cod to the Florida Coast, and also along the Gulf, the little tuna has been reported in abundance at certain seasons of the year. It has also been reported to be in fair abundance in various parts of the Caribbean Sea.



LITTLE TUNA
(*Euthynnus alletteratus*)

The following is a description of this fish taken from "North American Game Fishes," by Francesca La Monte, Doubleday and Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1946, p. 25: "Hind part of upper sides with oblique wavy bands and spots; lower sides usually plain silver, but sometimes with a few dark spots below pectoral. General ground colors bluish or greenish above, shading into silvery.

"Distinguishing Characters: Finlets following dorsal and anal fins. The color pattern. Lateral line not curved as in the Oceanic Bonito. Rather large scales in corselet in front near the pectoral fin; the rest of the body without scales.

Size: Averages about 10 pounds; may reach 20.

Food: Smaller fishes.

Habits: A pelagic fish of warm seas.

In the fall of 1946, and again in 1947, an enterprising packer on the Eastern Shore of Maryland canned a few thousand cases of "little tuna." The 1947 pack was approximately double that of 1946. Labeled "Light Meat Tuna," 1/it was distributed through brokers on the New York food market. A third pack was put up in 1948. The Fish and Wildlife Service canned a small experimental pack of little tuna at College Park, Maryland. The results were encouraging and some useful information was obtained. Further research into canning of this species is now in progress.

Indications of a potential new industry for the Atlantic Coast aroused considerable interest among fish canners, particularly on the West Coast, where a tuna industry had built up a canned tuna pack worth \$112,600,000 to the canner in 1948.

1/ The Food and Drug Administration in a letter dated August 26, 1948, and addressed to the Fish and Wildlife Service, declared: "We have your inquiry relative to the propriety of labeling as 'light meat tuna' a canned product prepared from Euthynnus alletteratus.

"The 'little tuna' is closely related to the skipjack, Katsuwonus pelamis, and is one of the species which are properly classed as tuna. The canned product prepared by the usual procedure in canning tuna is quite dark in color, somewhat coarse in texture, and relatively strong-flavored when compared with packs of yellowfin or bluefin tuna. For these reasons we are reserving final judgment as to the aptness of the 'light meat' designation. This species has received only limited attention commercially and we have no knowledge of consumer reaction to the canned product prepared from it. At the present time we are not taking exception to the designation of 'light meat tuna' when applied to the usual oil pack prepared from Euthynnus alletteratus."

Note: On June 29, 1949, the Food and Drug Administration's Food Standards Committee considered the following subjects: (1) Definition and Standard of Identity (2) Minimum Standard of Quality, and (3) Standard of Fill of Container for Canned Tuna. Preceding and following this meeting the Canned Tuna Standards Industry Committee considered the question of tuna standards. Editors note: At press time no report on these proceedings has been released but it is understood that the report will shortly be forthcoming and at that time will be distributed to tuna packer-members and other interested parties.

The Fish and Wildlife Service has attempted to accumulate available information on the identity, abundance, season, and location of these fish in the waters of the Atlantic Coast from commercial fishermen, sport fishermen, fish dealers, fish processors, and other observers.

The meager evidence collected indicates that these fish may maintain a seasonal migration along the Atlantic Coast. In the winter months they have been seen in large schools off the coasts of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. In May and June they have been reported as migrating north off the coast of North and South Carolina. In August and September, they have been caught with ocean pound nets in fair abundance off the coasts of New Jersey and New York. In November and December, these fish have been observed migrating south again off the coast of North Carolina. Like the menhaden though, some of these fish seem to remain in southern waters the year around. ✓

Since the field of study, so far, has been largely restricted to the Atlantic Coast, no data have been collected on the movements of these fish in the Gulf of Mexico. However, there are reports that they have been found off the coast of Mississippi in fair abundance in June.

Whiteleather and Brown, in their report on exploratory fishing in the Caribbean in 1945, 2/ say: "The survey in August and September found a fair number of schools of spotted bonito, some of which are mixed with Spanish mackerel" "The spotted bonito, although taken occasionally in oceanic waters, seems to be definitely a continental fish." "It is too shy to be taken in the tuck seine, but with a purse seine quiet schools can be surrounded and caught." The spotted bonito referred to is the little tuna.

Fiedler, Lobell, and Lucas, in the report of their survey in 1947, 3/ say of the Cuban fisheries: "The offshore species such as tuna are now little used. There are definite indications that enormous numbers of the various migratory species pass Cuba at certain times of year. A large and productive fishery could be established using these species as a basis. However, until commercial exploration is carried on, there remains only fragmentary evidence of the actual size of migrations."

2/ Whiteleather, R. T., and Brown, H. H., "An Experimental Fishery Survey in Trinidad, Tobago and British Guiana, With Recommended Improvements in Methods and Gear." Anglo-American Caribbean Commission, 1945, p. 22.

3/ Fiedler, Reginald H., Lobell, Milton J., and Lucas, Clarence R., "The Fisheries and Fishery Resources of the Caribbean Area." Fishery Leaflet No. 259, Fish and Wildlife Service, 1947, p. 165.

Carl Carlson, fishery engineer of the Fish and Wildlife Service, in conducting experiments with fishing gear in the South Atlantic in 1944 reported: "Numerous schools of the little tuna were observed during the month of June off the coast of Florida. These fish appeared in compact schools, exhibiting a lesser degree of activity than the schools of tuna which are captured with purse seines in the Pacific. Several of these schools were circled by our fishing vessel, and the distance traveled indicated that a purse seine of less than 300 fathoms in length would have been adequate to surround them."

A concern on the East Coast of Florida reports catching little tuna in June, July, and August, by trolling with spoons and artificial squid as lures. This firm reports that sometimes with two men trolling from a mackerel boat, from 1,000 to 5,000 pounds per day are caught.

Captain H. H. Von Harten of Beaufort, South Carolina, says that he has seen enormous schools of these fish in January and February, approximately 50 miles out in the ocean off his home port, and near the Gulf Stream. He said that ordinarily they were very easily taken with spoons and feather lures.

E. W. Copeland of Morehead City, North Carolina, reports that several years ago an ordinary menhaden boat, using the usual deep menhaden purse seines, caught about 50,000 pounds of these fish the first day the boat went out after them. It was Mr. Copeland's recollection that this catch was made either in December or in January. He attempted to make fish meal from these fish, but found them too large to handle in his menhaden processing plant. Since there was no market demand for this species he could find no use for them.

Another interesting report on these little tuna comes from fishermen on the lower Chesapeake Bay. They said that in 1946 several fairly large schools of these fish were seen "jumping all over the place" near Old Point Comfort. A few of the little tuna were caught by sportsmen trolling, but interest in the sport soon died down as no acceptable method of cooking them was found.

W. Emmett Andrews, formerly a fishery educational specialist in the Fish and Wildlife Service, reports that in early August 1940, while trolling with stag tail lures on the edge of the Gulf Stream about twenty miles off Ocean City, Maryland, his party caught ninety of these fish in less than an hour's time. The average weight was about eight pounds, and the range from 5 to 10 pounds. These fish were not seen from the surface and were encountered while trolling for other fish. The party trolled back and forth across the school until they caught all they wanted. Most of this catch was eaten by his friends and neighbors of Cambridge, Maryland. They split the fish, put them in heavy brine for about an hour to draw out the blood, drained them, sprinkled them with salt, and let them stand overnight. They found that by broiling the fish well and basting with hot bacon fat they made a tasty dish.

For a number of years these fish have been taken in fair amounts in ocean pound nets in August, September, and October off the coasts of New York and New Jersey. The determination of their abundance has been very difficult because this particular species of fish has had so many names, and has frequently been included with other species when reported by fishermen and dealers.

In statistical reports of the Fish and Wildlife Service, covering New Jersey and New York, for several years past, an annual take of approximately 500,000 pounds of frigate mackerel and bonito has been indicated. It is now believed, in the light of recent developments, that a fairly large percentage of this catch were "little tuna."

On August 27, 1948, a sports fishing party boatman, operating out of Forked River, New Jersey, said the ocean in this vicinity was alive with little tuna at that time, but he tried to avoid them because in this area nobody seemed to want them.

The scope of the confusion of names for this fish is indicated by the fact that in addition to the two names listed above, this fish is often called by many other names such as: false albacore, watermelon tuna, blood tub, boohoo, Mediterranean tunny, little tunny, and spotted bonito. Moreover, other species are often called by some of these names, thereby heightening the confusion.

It is expected that in due course the name "little tuna" will be accepted rather generally, as most authorities, including the American Fisheries Society, have agreed on it as the proper designation and the name least likely to cause confusion. However, at the present time this name is seldom used by either sport or commercial fishermen.

Note: This leaflet is a reprint of the original article which appeared in Southern Fisherman, August, 1949, Vol. IX, No. 10.

